

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 13, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Memphis Tigers
Penny Hardaway

Alex Lomax

Tyler Harris

Jalen Duren

Postgame Press Conference

Houston 71, Memphis 53

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah. It was a pretty good run over this last couple months, that came to an end without our first goal and that's to get an AAC championship, tournament championship. But that's over now. We have to move on to the NCAA Tournament. And we fought hard to get back there and we have to go back home, regroup and work and be ready to go out to Portland and compete.

Q. Penny, this was your goal you set out to do when you took this job. You've talked about thinking you should be in but now you know that you're in, what's the feeling?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It feels great. It feels bittersweet because we lost the championship game but we fought so hard to get back into the NCAA. I'm not going to let that go by without celebrating that. And we're still alive.

Hats off to Houston for coming out and doing a phenomenal job. That game is over with. Nothing we can do about it. Got to get ready to go to Portland.

Q. Penny, with all the ups and downs often this season, to be here at this point, I know there's a little bit of a sting of a loss as well but to be where you are now, making the tournament finals, just how do you put that into perspective?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Man, just perseverance, really. Just from never giving up. We were 3-4 at one point I think 9-8, you know, we're 21-10 now. So we fought hard to get



back to this position. That's what we wanted, man. We have a chance as good as anyone to go into the Tournament and make noise and I'm proud of that.

Q. This is for both Alex and Tyler: You guys have both talked about a lot over the years of one of the things, reasons you came to Memphis was to go with Memphis to the NCAA Tournament. You wanted to end your careers that way. I know it wasn't a lot of reaction -- you guys missed the actual announcement of it. But what does it feel like now to know you've gotten Memphis back to the NCAA tournament?

ALEX LOMAX: That was always a childhood dream, one day just come in and playing for your home and then getting to the tournament. This is my fourth year here. We were able to make it happen and to be able to make it happen this year is a pretty special feeling. We want to attack that and give it our all

TYLER HARRIS: Yeah, kind of the same things Ally said, childhood dream, growing up, watching March Madness, watching the NCAA Tournament. I'm a senior, this is my third year here. I came back. I wanted to be a part of this team, make it to the NCAA Tournament. We didn't get the seed we wanted, but it's still a great feeling that we're going to get the opportunity to go down and play in the NCAA Tournament

Q. Coach Hardaway, I would like to talk to you about your mentorship being from Memphis and having the opportunity to mentor these young men and how does it feel to pour this love into these young men and to the community of Memphis, sir?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, I don't take that lightly. Being from Memphis and having the opportunity to touch, you know, my team, the young men and also the guys that are from Memphis, it's a lot. I know it's a lot on these guys being from Memphis and staying home, staying in their ears about always doing the right thing, being good people, continue to work on your craft on the basketball court. It's just a gift from God. Just be thankful for that.

And, you know, it's just come full circle for me. Being in

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their shoes, being in the uniforms and having them have an opportunity now to experience the NCAA, it's even better because that's what we set out to do.

Q. You faced these guys last year in the NIT. I guess what are your initial thoughts on the match up facing Boise State now in the NCAA Tournament?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Really good team, organized, runs good offense. They're a really good team. Well coached. They know us because of playing us last year. We know them. We'll look at the film from this year and obviously last year with the returning players. But really good team.

Q. This is for Penny and then A-Lo and Tyler: It's an incredible accomplishment to come from where you came to be here and yet it seems sort of -- you're don't look elated up there? Is it more bitter or sweet? How are you feeling?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Well, it's tough to be excited after a loss, you know, especially a game that we felt like we could have won. But like again, I am going to celebrate being in the NCAA Tournament because that was the ultimate goal to get to the Tournament, but we also had an opportunity to take care of business today.

But the competitive nature in us is just not going to be elated and just forget what happened an hour ago, but we will be excited when we go to Portland.

ALEX LOMAX: The pain is still sitting on me after this game we just played. Tried to give it my all on the court but it didn't go how we wanted it to. So we've just got to let that out, and the next game coming up and just leave it all out on the court

TYLER HARRIS: Yeah. Kind of what Alex and Coach said, after a loss you can't really be excited right now. I feel like I didn't give it my all tonight. I'm up here right now, thought I'm not too proud of it. Just got to get back to the drawing board and worry about the next game.

Q. Coach and A-Lo, I just kind of wanted to talk -- this is a similar question to what you've been asked, but you, Penny, are a legend in Memphis, right? And when you got the job, people were high expectations, they were on you when things were up, they were on you when things were down. And now you've returned the program after all this time to the NCAA Tournament. Memphis put their hope in you and you delivered. So I just of want to know on a personal level how that makes you feel? And the fact that you and A-Lo were such a powerhouse at East (H.S.) in the city of Memphis, and then have this return to the NCAA

Tournament with you two together, him as a senior, you as a coach. How is that for you guys?

PENNY HARDAWAY: For me it's great because when I took the job, it was it was not at the highest form. You know, the fans weren't coming to the games, and I felt like the opportunity came about that I could do something about that initially. And then secondly, I thought I could go out and recruit kids that were going to help us get back to the NCAA Tournament. That didn't happen in the first three years. Obviously we missed an NCAA Tournament because of COVID and we did it this year. To do it with A-Lo, who I've been with for ten, going on 11 years, to be able to share this with him and Tyler, it's a great feeling. I mean, I know where this came from. And then where it's going and where it's headed. And it's headed in the right direction.

Q. Jalen, I'm curious, how are you feeling after that game yesterday? It didn't seem like there was any doubt you were going to play today. But how scary was that? Are you sore? Any worse for the wear after that fall against SMU?

JALEN DUREN: Honestly, I just -- I knew we had a great opportunity to come out today and win this game. I always tell Coach I want to do whatever it takes to win. And I understand my role on this team, and that I'm a big part of what we got going on. So I mean, nothing was going to stop me from suiting up today.

Q. And then obviously likely your time is limited in the college game. To get to the NCAA Tournament this year, how does it feel for you? And given what you had to go through as a team?

JALEN DUREN: It's amazing it's an exciting feeling, just like Coach and A-Lo and Ty said. It's bittersweet kind of coming after a loss but it's going to be fun to go out there in the Tournament. Coach's first time in the Tournament since he's been here. I feel like they're going to get us ready to make a huge run.

Q. I know it was hectic logistically, the game ends and you've got to go cool off and the selection show. So when did you guys actually hear that you were in, where you were going, who you were playing? How did that play out?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah. We went into the locker room. We should have just gone right up. We went into the locker room to talk to the team after the game. And they were like, we have to go up. And then right when we were talking in the hallway they said it just announced. And I didn't know where, I just knew it was Boise State.



We found out when we got up top that it was going to be Portland.

Q. And so I guess what's the first thing you thought of when you heard? And then this is for anybody, what was the first thought that crossed your mind when you found out where you were playing and who you were playing and that you were playing?

ALEX LOMAX: My first thought was we played them last year in the NIT. That was a really good team, great coach and they had a good offense. So we just go look back at that film and watch also the film from this season and just do a lot of research and a lot of film and a lot of study. That was just my first reaction.

JALEN DUREN: For me it was just -- I'm just ready to go, honestly, after this game. I'm ready to get back on the court and just kind of keep moving forward. Next-game mentality

TYLER HARRIS: Yeah, my thought was wherever we got to do, we've got to just go 1-0. That's been our whole thing throughout this run, we've just got to go 1-0.

Q. For you guys, you're about to play on the biggest stage in the NCAA Tournament and represent 901. What brand of basketball is the country about to see?

ALEX LOMAX: Just want to see that Memphis basketball, 901 heat, that's what we've got to get to. That's what we got to bring out every game.

TYLER HARRIS: Grit and grind.

JALEN DUREN: Just like A-Lo said, I'm not from Memphis but I kind of understood the type of culture that they have and I feel like that's the type of basketball you all are going to see.

Q. This one is for Tyler it's not everyday and we've talked about this before that you see a guy transfer them come back in a walk-on role. A, obviously how difficult that was decision? And, B, just thinking about your journey and where you are now to get to this point with the Tigers, what you set out to do when you were choosing between Memphis or Baylor way back when. Can you speak to the mindset in the big picture of where you are and where you've gotten to now?

TYLER HARRIS: I would say actually coming back it was a very easy decision. Really when you leave somewhere and come back, you accept any role you've got to take, any minutes you get, any jersey number. Just it was an easy call. It started off I wasn't getting as many minutes as I

wanted to. I just wanted to win. And like I told Coach when I come back, you know, we never talked about playing time, you know, shot attempts, anything. I told him I just wanted to come back, graduate from the University of Memphis, you know, make it to the NCAA Tournament.

And this year, a lot of things -- we dealt with injuries. Guys went down, and my name got called. And I wanted to step up for the team. I still feel like I'm a veteran out there, even though I'm a walk-on, so, yeah.

Q. Jalen, I have a question for you: I see that you're not from Memphis, like you already alluded to. But I see the hard work and the determination. It seems like it just pours into you. It's like you feel it. And I would like to ask Alex and also Tyler, how were you able to allow him to feel that and bring him in to you all's culture?

JALEN DUREN: I mean, that's just who I am. Honestly. Of course, that's the type of culture Memphis already had, and that's why I feel like I fit into this program perfectly because of the type of mentality I bring. Coach Hardaway brings a non-losing mentality. He always wants to win. A-Lo, Tyler, we all just want to win and do anything to win.

I feel like being my mindset coming in, it was just a perfect fit.

ALEX LOMAX: From that standpoint, the biggest thing with Jalen getting his trust off the court. It's bigger than basketball, the relationship we've built. We got very close over these last couple of months. And, you know, on the court, the trust. Also just leaving my body on the line, leaving everything on the line. We got that in common. So just to let that mesh together for both of us, it just shows a lot of trust that we got. Like he said, he came in with the right mentality already, and we just had to get that trust on and off the court.

TYLER HARRIS: Jalen is a guy, he came in with the right mentality. He wanted to win. I learned a lot about him this year. He wants to do anything it takes the win. Even if he's having a great game and somebody else is playing good, he'll let them rock out.

Just like A-Lo said, off the court, you know, we're very cool. And he's a great ball player. I mean, you can't really want to take the shine from him. You want him to get all the shine because he's bigger than me and A-Lo when you got a guy like Jalen Duren.

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